

# When Wilford Conetah speaks, people in the Myton area listen

**By Susan Lyman**  
Deseret News staff writer

MYTON, Duchesne County — Wilford Conetah listens more than he speaks. He declined to speak at all, last week, about his position on the Ute Tribal Business Committee.

Conetah and the other five members of that governing body were recalled this week in a vote tribal attorney Steve Boyden says violates the tribe's constitution. Conetah, who is in the middle of his four-year term, says his job is full of pressure. He doesn't say much else.

As a Myton City councilman, Wilford Conetah doesn't say much during City Council meetings, either. Perhaps that's why when he does speak his words sound so solid.

Conetah is the first Native American to be elected to the City Council. He won more votes than any other council member.

During last week's two-hour council meeting he made approximately two comments. The others listened when he spoke.

First, concerning the town's 1940 fire engine, "That's a good truck," he said. "That's the fire truck I grew up with."

Simple words, yet they made everyone in attendance feel good about the decision they wanted to reach. They didn't want to get rid of the proud old pumper — even though they've got two new ones. They want to keep it up and drive it in local parades.

On the subject of what project to propose for a Community Development Block Grant, Conetah listened intently while ideas unfolded. Mayor Ludy Cooper asked each of the coun-



**Wilford Conetah**

cil members and the one citizen in attendance for suggestions. Talk swirled and flowed.

Finally it came down to two worthy ideas: Sidewalks — for safety (if they could get the school children to use them) and to improve the town's appearance for anyone who ventures off U.S. 40 into the heart of Myton; or low-income housing. "We couldn't help all the people who asked last year," said Cooper. "A \$20,000 grant might fix up four or five houses."

When it was Conetah's turn to comment he said, "We still have a big problem with our water table. We don't want to build sidewalks if they are going to buckle." Within minutes the council voted to concentrate on low-income housing this year and sidewalks next year, after they could assess how well the town's new drains were working.

Later, Conetah talked about Myton. Though he's careful to follow his own policy of "not mixing tribal government with city government," one might assume the man's priorities and style of leadership to be the same in both jobs.

"I think about the people," he says. "Whether they approve of me or not, I try to do what's best for them."

"For a small town in the state of Utah the biggest problem is money. A lot of times people don't understand we have to stand in line to get grants from the state."

"One of the biggest things I'd like to see is economic development. The Uintah Basin's lost a lot of business due to the crunch in oil prices. Oil companies were the biggest employer."

"I'd like to see the people in Myton get what they need through the years. Have their children be able to find a job and stay in the area. Right now that's not too realistic."

Though he grew up in Myton, school and the military took Conetah to big cities and foreign ports. When his time on the Tribal Council and City Council are over, Conetah plans to leave again. He feels at home in many cultures, he explains. He likes to see how other people live.

But then he plans to return home. And while he's gone he will still care about the people of the Uintah Basin. Especially, of course, his tribe. "I don't have any children," he explains. "But I have a family. These people are my brothers and sisters."

Eventually Conetah would like to return to the career he loves most. Teaching third grade. A good job for a good listener. "When I was teaching I heard a million little secrets," he says, smiling.

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